

We Claim:

1. A software product configured to create an on-line reservation system comprising:

5 a web portal module configured to create a portal web site;

a search module configured to locate a selected merchant in response to a search request from an Internet user to locate the selected merchant among a plurality of merchants affiliated with the portal web site;

10 a time-slot display module configured to display time-slots at the selected merchant's place of business;

15 a booking module configured to allow the Internet user to book one of the displayed available time-slots; and

a confirmation module configured to provide the Internet user a real-time confirmation of the booked time-slot.

20 2. The software product of claim 1, wherein the web portal module and the search module are configured to be executed on a host computer.

3. The software product of claim 2, further comprising a database module configured to store booking information associated with the booked time-slot on the host computer.

25 4. The software product of claim 3, wherein the database module is further configured to store user demographic information associated with the Internet user on the host computer.

5. The software product of claim 4, wherein the software product is further configured to store a second copy of the booking information and the user demographic information on a second computer affiliated with the selected merchant.

5 6. The software product of claim 1, further comprising a host database configured to store the aggregate of the booking and Internet user information for substantially all of the plurality of merchants affiliated with the portal web site.

7. The software product of claim 6, wherein the software product further comprises a
10 merchant database, which is a subset of the host database, the merchant database configured to store substantially all of the information associated with the booked time-slots at the selected merchant's place of business.

8. The software product of claim 1, wherein the search module is configured to
15 locate the selected merchant using at least one of the following search criteria: name of merchant; city of merchant; state of merchant; market of merchant; and/or type of services offered by merchant.

9. The software product of claim 1, further comprising a cancellation module
20 configured to permit the Internet user to cancel the booked time-slot.

10. The software product of claim 9, wherein the cancellation module further comprises a booking search module to locate the previously booked time-slot for cancellation by the Internet user.

11. The software product of claim 1, wherein the portal web site is aligned with at
25 least one of the following vertical markets: food service market; golf market; hotel and inn market; salon market; spa market; cinema market; performing arts market; medical market; and/or sports market.

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12. The software product of claim 1, wherein the time-slot display module further comprises a time-slot search module configured to search and display the available and not available time-slots at the selected merchant's place of business for a selected time period as defined by the Internet user.

13. The software product of claim 1, further comprising a database module having a plurality of records, each one of the plurality of records corresponding to substantially all the time-slots that can be displayed by the time-slot display module, the time-slot display module and the booking module further configured to interface with the database module so that the booking module reserves a selected available time-slot by writing booking information to the record in the database module corresponding to the selected available time-slot.

14. The software product of claim 13, wherein the booking module further comprises a data entry module configured to enable the Internet user to write user information to the record corresponding to the selected available time-slot.

15. The software product of claim 14, wherein the user information includes at least one of the following: user name, user's email address; user's home address; user's phone number; user's occupation; user's income; and user's interests.

16. The software product of claim 1, wherein the confirmation module further comprises an electronic message generation module configured to automatically send an electronic message confirmation to the Internet user after one of the available time-slots has been booked.

17. The software product of claim 16, wherein the electronic message generation module is further configured to send a reminder electronic message reminding the Internet user of the booked time-slot at a predetermined time prior to the booked time-slot.

18. The software product of claim 1, wherein the software product is further configured to interface with a merchant web site module configured to provide an Internet web page affiliated with the selected merchant, the merchant web site module being
5 linked between the search module and the time-slot display module.

19. The software product of claim 18, wherein the web portal module, the search module, and the merchant web site module are all configured to be hosted on a host computer.

20. The software product of claim 18, wherein the web portal module and the search module are configured to be executed on a host computer and the merchant web site module is configured to be executed on a second computer affiliated with the selected merchant.

21. The software product of claim 1, further comprising a security module configured to prevent the unauthorized access of booking and Internet user information.

22. A method for providing an on-line reservation system, the method comprising the
20 steps of:

associating a plurality of merchants with a portal web site;

providing a search module configured to locate a selected merchant among the
25 plurality of merchants affiliated with the portal web site in response to a request received by an Internet user;

making time-slots available at the selected merchant's place of business available
for display over the Internet for viewing by the Internet user;

accepting from the Internet user a booking of one of the displayed available time-slots; and

providing to the Internet user over the Internet a real-time confirmation of the booked time-slot at the selected merchant's place of business.

23. The method of claim 22, further comprising the steps of:

maintaining an aggregate database having a plurality of records, each one of the plurality of records corresponding to the aggregate of the time-slots for substantially all of the merchants affiliated with the portal web site; and

for each of the affiliated merchants, maintaining a merchant database which is a subset of the aggregate database, the merchant database for a selected merchant containing the subset of records in the aggregate database corresponding to the selected merchant; and

writing booking information inputted by the Internet user to the selected record in the merchant database corresponding to the booked time-slot.

24. The method of claim 23, further comprising the step of maintaining a cache copy of the merchant database including the booking information for the booked time-slots at a computer affiliated with the selected merchant.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein the step of providing the Internet user a real-time confirmation further comprises the step of generating an email confirmation message to the Internet user immediately after the booked time-slot at the selected merchant's place of business has been written to a database record corresponding to the booked time-slot.

26. The method of claim 23, further comprising the step of generating a reminder email at a predetermined time prior to the booked time-slot to remind the Internet user of the booked time-slot.

5 27. A system configured to provide an on-line reservation system, the system comprising:

10 a computer, coupled to the Internet, and configured to maintain a portal web site affiliating a plurality of merchants, wherein the computer is configured to execute computer code having the following modules:

15 a search module configured to locate a selected merchant among the plurality of merchants with the portal web site in response to a search request from an Internet user;

a data retrieval module to transfer time-slots available at the selected merchants place of business to the Internet user for display over the Internet;

20 a booking module to accept from the Internet user a booking of one of the displayed available time-slots; and

25 a confirmation module to provide the Internet user over the Internet a real-time confirmation of the booked time-slot at the selected merchant's place of business.

28. The system of claim 27, wherein the computer further comprises a database having a plurality sub-databases each corresponding to one of the plurality of affiliated merchants, each of the sub-databases having a plurality of records corresponding to the time-slots of the corresponding merchant.

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29. The system of claim 28, wherein the computer further comprises a security element which is configured to allow the affiliated merchants to access only their corresponding sub-database in the database over the Internet.

30. The system of claim 28, further comprising second computers associated with each of the affiliated merchants and respectively coupled to the Internet, the first computer and the second computers being configured to allow a cache copy of the sub-databases corresponding to each of the affiliated merchants to be stored on the second computers associated with the merchants respectively.

31. The system of claim 27, wherein the confirmation module further comprises an email confirmation message to the Internet user immediately after the booked time-slot at the selected merchant's place of business has been written to a database record corresponding to the booked time-slot.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein the email module is further configured to generate a reminder email a predetermined time prior to the booked time-slot to remind the Internet user of the booked time-slot.

33. The software product of claim 1, further comprising a database module, the database module configured to maintain the booking information associated with substantially all booked time slots at the merchant's place of business, including the time-slots booked over the Internet and the time-slots not booked over the Internet.

34. The method of claim 22, further comprising the step of maintaining a database associated with the selected merchant, the maintaining step further including the steps of:

maintaining the bookings of the time-slots by Internet users using the Internet;

and

maintaining the bookings of the time-slots not made over the Internet.

35. The system of claim 27, further comprising a database module, the database
5 module configured to maintain the booking information associated with substantially all
booked time slots at the merchant's place of business, including the time-slots booked
over the Internet and the time-slots not booked over the Internet.

36. A software product configured to create an on-line reservation system comprising:

10 a web portal module configured to create a portal web site;

15 a search module configured to locate a selected merchant in response to a search
request from an Internet user to locate the selected merchant among a plurality of
merchants affiliated with the portal web site;

a time-slot display module configured to display time-slots at the selected
merchant's place of business;

20 a booking module configured to allow the Internet user to book one of the
displayed available time-slots;

25 a database module configured to maintain the booking information associated
with substantially all the booked time-slots at the merchant's place of business, including
the time-slots booked over the Internet and the time-slots not booked over the Internet;
and

30 a confirmation module configured to provide the Internet user a real-time
confirmation of the booked time-slot.

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